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Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 211139Z JUL 76
FM AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6482

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUDAPEST 2456

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, HU
SUBJ: CALL ON CARDINAL LEKAI, PRIMATE OF HUNGARY

1. AS INDICATED IN BUDAPEST 2299, I CALLED ON CARDINAL LASZLO LEKAI, NEWLY-APPOINTED PRIMATE OF HUNGARY AT THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE IN ESZTERGOM AT 1100 ON JULY 20.

2. CARDINAL LEKAI IS A MUCH MORE DYNAMIC PERSON THAN WRITTEN DESCRIPTIONS OF HIM USUALLY INDICATE. A SHORT, STOCKY, VIGOROUS MAN, HE GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF A CONFIDENT, SELF-ASSURED LEADER. HE APPEARS TO BE IN EXCELLENT HEALTH AND LOOKS YOUNGER THAN HIS 66 YEARS.

3. THE CARDINAL RECEIVED ME IN HIS PERSONAL, THREE-ROOM, FAIRLY ORNATE BUT RATHER MODESTLY APPOINTED SUITE CONSISTING OF A BEDROOM, AN OFFICE AND A RECEPTION ROOM OF MODERATE SIZE.

4. I CONGRATULATED THE CARDINAL ON HIS RECENT ELEVATION AND HOS APPOINTMENT AS CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS, AND I WISHED HIM WELL IN HIS NEW AND IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITIES. I TOLD HIM I WAS PLEASED THAT HE WAS PLANNING TO VISIT THE U.S. SOON TO ATTEND THE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS IN PHILADELPHIA.

5. THE CARDINAL, AN EASY AND RELAXED CONVERSATIONALIST, SEEMED PLEASED WITH MY VISIT AND SAID HE LOOKED FORWARD TO HIS VISIT TO THE U.S. HE PLANS TO SPEND NINE DAYS IN
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PHILADELPHIA, AND SEVERAL MORE VISITING CITIES ALONG THE

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EASTERN SEABOARD, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON HUNGARIAN-AMERICAN DIOCESES. CARDINAL LEKAI REFERRED TO WARM LETTERS OF WELCOME HE HAD RECEIVED FROM CARDINALS KROL OF PHILADELPHIA AND BERNARDIN OF CINCINNATI, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE U.S. CONCIL OF BISHOPS. HE SAID HIS DELEGATION WILL CONSIST OF ELEVEN PRELATES, INCLUDING THREE BISHOPS IN ADDITION TO HIMSELF, AND THREE LAYMEN.

6. I ASKED THE CARDINAL HOW HE SAW THE SITUATION OF THE CHURCH IN HUNGARY TODAY. REPLYING CONFIDENTLY AND WITHOUT HESITATION, HE BEGAN BY SAYING QUOTE IT IS BETTER TODAY THAN IT WAS YESTERDAY, AND I HOPE IT WILL BE BETTER TOMORROW THAN IT IS TODAY UNQUOTE. AFTER WORLD WAR II, HE CONTINUED, THE CHURCH HAD TO PASS THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES, DURING WHICH IT HAD TO LEARN TO MAKE SOME HARD ADJUSTMENTS TO NEW RELAITIES. BEFORE THE WAR THE CHURCH HAD BEEN PREDOMINANT IN HUNGARY. AFTER THE WAR THE COMMUNIST STATE BECAME PREDOMINANT AND IT ENERGETICALLY ESTABLISHED ITS RULE. NOW THE ADJUSTMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE AND EACH SIDE REALIZES IT CANNOT GET ALONG WITHOUT THE OTHER.

7. SPEAKING WITH THE SELF-ASSURED TONE OF A MAN FEELING HIMSELF AN EQUAL WITH LEADERS OF THE STATE, HE SAID OUTRIGHT THAT THE IDEOLOGY OF THE ATHEIST STATE AND THE CHURCH WERE IRRECONCILABLE. BUT, HE CONTINUED, IN EVERYDAY LIFE THERE WERE MANY AREAS IN WHICH THE CHURCH AND STATE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENERAL WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE, AND THAT COOPERATION SERVED THE INTERESTS OF BOTH SIDES. THE LEADERS OF THE STATE, HE SAID, HAVE COME TO THE REALIZATION THAT THE CHURCH IS HERE TO STAY, THAT THERE ARE LARGE NUMBERS OF "BELIEVERS" IN THE COUNTRY, AND THAT THE STATE NEEDS THEM IN ORDER TO DEVELOP THE COUNTRY. THUS, A WORKING CO-EXISTENCE HAS GRADUALLY CRYSTALLIZED.

8. CARDINAL LEKAI SHIFTED THE COVERSATION TO SOME HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH IN HUNGARY, AND GRADUALLY CAME AROUND TO TELLING SOME STORIES ABOUT ST. STEPHAN. HE THEN INQUIRED WHERE THE CROWN OF ST. STEPHAN WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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BEING KEPT AT THE PRESENT TIME. I REPLIED THAT IT WAS IN THE U.S. AND THAT IT WAS BEING CAREFULLY KEPT UNDER CONDITIONS APPROPRIATE TO ITS SPECIAL CHARACTER.

9. THE CARDINAL SAID THAT THE CHRUCH IN HUNGARY WOULD VERY MUCH WELCOME THE RETURN OF THE CROWN, WHICH IT CONSIDERED TO BE HUNGARY'S MOST PRECIOUS RELIC. HE SPOKE OF HOW CAREFULLY BOTH THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

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ARE PRESERVING AND RESTORING HUNGARY'S HISTORICAL
TREASURES, AND OF HOW SERIOUSLY THE HISTORICAL PAST
OF THE COUNTRY WAS BEING RESPECTED, TAUGHT AND STUDIED.

10. IN SPITE OF THOSE DEEPLY-FELT REMARKS ABOUT THE
CROWN, HOWEVER, THE CARDINAL DID NOT GIVE THE IMPRESSION
THAT HE PLANNED TO RAISE THE ISSUE IN THE U.S. HE
DEALT WITH THE SUBJECT IN A MANNER SOMEWHAT DETACHED
FROM HIS UPCOMING VISIT. ON THE OTHER HAND, PARTICULARLY
DURING HIS VISITS TO HUNGARIAN DIOCESES, THE SUBJECT
IS QUITE LIKELY TO COME UP, AND THE CARDINAL LEFT
LITTLE DOUBT ON WHAT HIS POSITION WILL BE WHEN IT DOES.

11. THE CALL, WHICH WAS CORDIAL AND RELAXED FROM EVERY
POINT OF VIEW, LASTED EXACTLY ONE HOUR. ON MY WAY OUT,
I WAS SOMEWHAT SURPRISED TO FIND THE CANADIAN AMBASSADOR
IN THE RECEPTION AREA, WAITING FOR HIS TURN TO MAKE A
CALL.
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